

The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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CHAPTER EIGHT

MATTHEW 5:1, 2

IT is important that we should intelligently understand the place of this Manifesto in the work of Jesus. We will therefore consider its occasion, its method, and its nature as revealed in these words; **“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, His disciples came unto Him: and He opened His mouth and taught them.”**

- Its occasion was Christ's vision of the multitudes.
- Its method was that of the enunciation of the laws of His Kingdom, not to the multitudes, but to His own disciples.
- Its nature was that of revealing to them the first value of the Kingdom as being spiritual, and its ultimate expression as being material.

The occasion **“Seeing the multitudes.”**

This is a very familiar phrase. Jesus had commenced His ministry. The days of privacy were forever over. He had emerged from the quietness and seclusion of Nazareth, and had commenced to tread the pathway upon which there beats a fiercer light than ever falls upon a throne the pathway of the public teacher. As He began there was a strange and wonderful attractiveness in Him, and the multitudes gathered round Him. The unfit people of all the countryside were attracted to Him. Probably the people in that district had no idea how many unfit and incompetent people there were in their midst until Jesus, moving through the towns and villages, drew them round Himself.

We cannot too often read these words or too solemnly consider them and catch their meaning **“they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.”**

What a gathering of unfit people! But not merely such. They crowded after Him, from Decapolis, from Galilee, from Jerusalem, from Judaea and beyond Jordan. The people attracted by Jesus were not a people of one class or of one caste. He attracted to Himself all sorts and conditions of men; and as the King passed through that region, all kinds of people came out after Him, crowded after Him; many of them to see His works, the curious crowd, always attracted by something out of the ordinary, the weakest part of the crowd, always the most difficult to deal with.

Other men were attracted to Him not so much by His works as by His words.

But whatever the motive, they came, all sorts and conditions of men. People jostled each other who had never done so before; Pharisees side by side with publicans; ritualists side by side with harlots, and sinners; men of light and leading, and the scholarly men of the age, side by side with the illiterate, the degraded, the depraved.

The presence of Jesus meant the massing of humanity without any reference whatever to the mere accidentals of birth, and caste, and position.

- Pharisees dropped their quibbling for a little to listen.
- Publicans quitted their seats of custom to hear Him.
- Men forgot everything about their divisions.

Caste never lives for five minutes in the presence of Jesus Christ. He burns it up with His coming. He is never attracted to a man because of the breadth of his phylactery, or the enlargement of the border of his garment. He is never repelled from a man blessed be God! by his rags. Underneath the rags and the phylactery He sees the man, and He is after the man, not his clothes. And men know it, and they are always attracted by a man who is after men; so they gather to Him. That, then, was the occasion.

“Seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain” leaving the multitudes in the valley.

They did not stay there; they followed Him, and there is no doubt they heard a great deal of this Manifesto. But He did not address it to them; the Manifesto was not for the mixed multitude. It is not for the mixed multitude to-day. **“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, His disciples came unto Him: and He opened His mouth and taught them”** - the disciples, not the multitudes.

You ask; Do you mean to say Jesus did not intend this enunciation of laws for the multitude? Do you mean to say He left the multitude, abandoned the multitude, had no care for the multitude, and gave His teaching to a handful? Yes; but He left the multitude in order that He might get back to the multitude. He left the multitude in order that He might equip the men who would obey His law, and then show the multitude what that law really meant in life.

He left the multitude in order that He might begin the training of that company of men who should return to the multitude and bless the multitude.

The method of Jesus is manifested in this.

The multitude cannot appreciate this law; cannot obey it; will not be attracted by it; will rather be affrighted by it. He must give the law to some souls who can appreciate it, obey it, and then manifest it. He must give His law, not to the promiscuous mob, which is curious merely, but to the selected souls who are loyal. That is the principle.

Do not forget that the multitude is in His vision and in His heart. It is that He may get back to them, that He leaves them, and enunciates the ethic of His Kingdom to the few. He saw the multitudes. How think you, He saw them? He saw them as they were, and He saw them as they might have been.

Christ's vision of the crowd is a vision of the crowd as it is, in comparison with the crowd as it might be. He saw their ruin, but He saw the possibility lying behind the ruin. He saw God's order. He was God's King.

- He knew what God's Kingdom meant in an individual life, for He was living therein Himself.
- He knew what God's government meant in a social order.
- He knew that if God's Kingdom were established among the multitudes, there would be none of the class bitterness and caste distinction driving man from man, brother from brother.
- He knew that if God's Kingdom were established among the multitudes there would follow the true social order; that humanity in the Kingdom of God would not be an aggregation of individuals fighting for individual existence, but a great community of men, in which every man should make his contribution to the commonwealth.

He saw the possibility of a great communism. Do not be afraid of great words because they have been abused. Jesus Christ's was the real socialism, the communism of humanity, the great brotherhood of men. He knew these things could only be realized as men were related to the throne of God. He knew that socialism is not anarchy.

First there must be the relation of all men to the throne of God, and then their necessary and consequent interrelation among each other. And as Jesus Christ looked out over the multitudes He saw them scattered as sheep without a shepherd; no one to fold them, no one to feed them, no one to lead them, no one to govern them.

And seeing the multitudes, and knowing that they needed supremely the Kingdom of God set up, He left them and took a few men with Him, and unfolded to them the laws of the Kingdom, and began the work of coming back to the multitude with the revelation of that Kingdom.

He saw the multitudes. One loves to read those words, for here we see the King, God's King, our King, the King of the whole world, looking at the disorderly multitudes, the disorganized multitudes, and we see burning in His heart the primal passion of a King.

God's kings are always shepherds, and shepherds feed the flock, rather than are fed by the flock. Shepherds fold the flock, rather than expect the flock to fold them. And the primal passion of the King is burning here.

Here are the people, spoiled, disorganized, because they have lost their relation to the throne of God; and seeing them, seeing the multitudes, the great heart of the King yearning over His people, He went up into the mountain.

That leads us by a necessary sequence to the second matter - the method of the Master as He sets Himself toward reaching the multitudes with the Kingdom of God.

“His disciples came unto Him, and He opened His mouth and taught them.”

Here we must pause carefully, for an understanding of that principle, and this method will help us through the study of this Manifesto.

Who are these men to whom He is speaking? Souls loyal to His Kingdom. Jesus never gives the law of His Kingdom to any save to those in His Kingdom. No man can have the benefits of this Kingdom until he has kissed the sceptre of the King. When a man has bowed to the King then he has an obligation to the King and must obey the law of the King.

The late Magee once said that it was impossible to conduct the affairs of the English nation on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount, and there was a great commotion among the religious and irreligious papers, and he was criticized from Dan to Beersheba. But Magee was quite right. You cannot govern the English nation on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount because the nation is not loyal to the King.

If you have any doubt, all you have to do in these interesting days is to get a seat in the legislative chambers and endeavor to introduce half a dozen principles from the Sermon on the Mount in a short bill, and see if you can get them carried. You will find that to be the surest test of the accuracy of what the preacher said. You cannot do it, because you are not dealing with a people prepared to obey.

Let not this be misunderstood for a single moment. Has a Christian man nothing to do with Government? He has everything to do with it, or ought to have. We are to dictate the terms of righteousness to every Government. The Church of God needs to shake herself free from all complicity with every political party in the State, and then she will be able to dictate the terms of righteousness on behalf of humanity and God. That is her business.

It is quite impossible to take the Sermon on the Mount and try to get men to obey it until they are themselves obedient to the King. Think of some of the things He said:

**“Ye are the salt of the earth . . .
Ye are the light of the world.”**

Do you suppose He meant the mixed multitude when He said that?

And every benefit that He speaks of is a benefit belonging to the man who is in the Kingdom, and not to the man outside.

A man comes and asks if we will not treat him as Jesus has taught us to do in the Sermon on the Mount. Certainly we will. But when a man in rebellion against the laws of Jesus asks us to give him our coat, we decline. Let him enter the Kingdom, and as God shall help us we will try and help him, suffer with him, rejoice with him. We have no right to take these benefits of the Kingdom and scatter them before a people who are still rebelling against the King. He begins by enunciating the law to the disciples.

The nature of this Manifesto is revealed in the words, **“He taught them.”**

Now the need of a Kingdom was common consciousness in the days of Jesus Christ. The very crowd who crucified Him were sighing after the setting up of a Kingdom. There was no question in the mind as to the value which would have accrued if this Kingdom could have been set up in some way. That is true to-day.

Men are everywhere acknowledging the need of some new social order.

Jesus had to teach in order to show that the ideal of the Kingdom in their mind was a degraded ideal. The ideal of the Kingdom, popular in the days of Jesus, was that of a Kingdom material in its conception and exclusive in its application.

We need not follow the subject further than to say that we have only to watch the disciples themselves to see how degraded their ideal was. Notwithstanding the teaching, it was a long time before the vision of the Kingdom broke upon them!

After His resurrection they came back with the same old question:

“Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”

It was purely a material question. They expected a king with an earthly policy, an earthly government, an earthly army and retainers, setting up a kingdom of the earth. That is what men were looking for.

Even men outside the circle of His followers had hoped that Jesus Christ had come to break the power of Rome, to be the divider amongst them as to property. And Christ had to teach these men that He was not proposing to begin His government thus.

Christ does not begin in the material realm:

- He came to teach men that character is before conduct.
- He came to teach them that the spiritual relation underlies the material manifestation.
- He came to teach them, as we shall see, that He does not say a word about policy, not a word about the government of property, not a single word about any of these things; but He gets down under the surface, and He corrects man in the realm of his character.

He says “Blessed,” but never a single blessing does He pronounce upon having anything or doing anything; every blessing is pronounced upon being.

When Jesus came to set up a Kingdom, the first thing He said was; It is not a question of what you have, or what you do, save in a secondary sense; it is a question of what you are.

And that abides until this hour in all national affairs.

We are bound to go on legislating in this country, of course. The Legislature must meet and do some good or harm, as the case may be. They must go on. But the true imperialist is the Christian man who recognizes that Jesus was right when He said: Deal with men as to what they are first, then you can touch all the other things.

Everybody else who has tried to lift the world has tried to purify a stream. He passes back to the fountain source and purifies it there. Character is supreme. The spiritual is the fundamental. These things being set right, everything else will be set right. And so Jesus left the world without a political program uttered, without the constitution of a State given to men in detail. And yet He left having uttered the one and only political program, the one and only State constitution He left the world, leaving behind Him the revelation of the fact that being is more than having or doing; that the spiritual fact is the fundamental fact in all life.

The occasion of the Manifesto, then, was Christ's vision of the multitudes, and their need, and His determination to reach them. Retiring from them, He took time to instruct a few loyal souls concerning His Kingdom in order that through them the multitudes might see the breadth and beauty and beneficence of the Kingdom of God.

His method was that of gathering loyal souls around Him, giving them the law of the Kingdom because they had yielded to the claim of the King.

Finally, the nature of the Manifesto is an unfolding of principle, a teaching of men, which corrects the mistaken notions of national greatness and reveals the things which are supreme.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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